

PERSONAL NARRATIVES
OF EVENTS IN THE
WAR OF THE REBELLION,

BEING PAPERS READ BEFORE THE
RHODE ISLAND SOLDIERS AND SAILORS
HISTORICAL SOCIETY

THIRD SERIES.—No. 2.

PROVIDENCE:
PUBLISHED BY THE SOCIETY.
1883.

PROVIDENCE PRESS COMPANY, PRINTERS.

MY FOUR MONTHS' EXPERIENCE

AS A

PRISONER OF WAR.

BY

THOMAS SIMPSON,

[Late Captain Battery F, First Regiment, Rhode Island Light Artillery.]

PROVIDENCE:
PUBLISHED BY THE SOCIETY.
1883.

MY FOUR MONTHS' EXPERIENCE

AS A

PRISONER OF WAR.



Battery "F," First Regiment, Rhode Island Light Artillery, with which I had served from its muster-in, was encamped on the twenty-seventh of October, 1864, at Jones' Landing on the James river, a little below and on the bank opposite Aikens' Landing. As the term of service of the officers and of most of the enlisted men expired on the twenty-eighth, we had received orders to draw out from the line of works to enable us better to make out the necessary papers connected with our muster-out; and we had been encamped here a week or two. Having occasion to visit Corps Headquarters, some three miles from the James river, on the twenty-sixth, I found all the troops that could be spared from the works,

massed in rear preparatory to some movement, whither or with what object the commanding officers only knew, and they were not disposed to be communicative. Never having been near where an action was taking place in which our battery did not participate, or at least expect to, I determined, if a possible excuse could be found, to follow and to be a looker on. Returning to camp I found Major William Monroe, Allotment Commissioner from Rhode Island, paying the men their State bounty then due. He remained over night, and in the morning, after taking him in my ambulance to Bermuda Hundred, where he took the Norfolk boat, I returned to camp, had my horse saddled, and with an excuse in the shape of a muster-roll, which the Commissary of Musters had notified me it would be necessary for him to see before approving the officers' applications for muster-out, I started for headquarters, accompanied by an orderly ; neither of us with arms of any description.

Arriving at the ground where the troops had been massed the day previous, I found they had started at daybreak, and, learning about the direc-

tion they had gone, I followed, hoping to overtake them by noon. Riding some five miles, we came to a brigade of our cavalry drawn up in line at a cross-road, a squadron or two of which were evidently ready to charge down one of the roads. I halted here a few moments talking with some acquaintances in the First New York Mounted Rifles, (better known in our corps, at least, as "Mounted Robbers"), and after making some inquiries as to the whereabouts of Corps Headquarters, without getting anything definite, except that it was ahead, rode on. Some five hundred yards from these troops the road branched to the left, and as it seemed to have been travelled most recently in that direction, I concluded it was the one taken by the corps I was in pursuit of and turned down, having inquired of stragglers whom we overtook on the road as to how far the corps was ahead, etc., with rather poor success. Seeing two mounted men approaching, and supposing them to be orderlies from some headquarters, I thought that at last we should learn something definite; and we did. When within a pace or two, and just about to speak to them, you can imagine I was

somewhat astonished at receiving the order, "Halt ! Surrender !" backed by a double-barreled shot-gun and Spencer rifle. The road at this point was quite narrow, fenced on each side, and although within easy gunshot of our cavalry, it was completely hidden from them by a narrow strip of woods and a bend in the road. To turn back was to be shot, unless a miracle should save us ; to go ahead I knew was to Richmond and a rebel prison. However, I had little time to weigh the chances, which I thought then, as I do now, were in favor of the latter.

Ordering us to ride on in front at a canter, our captors followed at the same gait for perhaps a quarter of a mile, when one of them, riding alongside, requested me to show him my watch ; this I declined to do and he dropped back without a word. After riding a short distance further, we turned down a cart-path in the woods, and in a little while met two more of those scouts, as they call themselves. Here the individual anxious to possess my watch, again came alongside, ordered us to halt, and deliberately cocking and presenting a pistol to my head, remarked, "Now I'll take that watch." Of

course I was unable to resist such persuasion as this, so handing him the watch I remarked that it was a valuable one, and asked him to take good care of it. He assured me that he would, and he has—such good care that I have not seen it since. These other two had several prisoners whom they had captured, among others the orderly of the Medical Director of our Corps, who told me that the Medical Director had been captured on the very road on which I had been taken, while looking for a place to park his ambulances. Although I wished no harm to the "Doctor," yet I felt a little better on finding that others had gone before on the same road as myself.

The entire party waited here in the woods for two more of their number whom they had left lying in ambush on the main road, and whose horses they had in charge. It was while thus waiting that I began to realize our situation, and a more disagreeable one can hardly be imagined. I was soaked to the skin by a cold rain, which had commenced falling early in the day, and which was now pouring down as though we were about to have another flood; had had nothing to eat since the day previous,

though to tell the truth I was not hungry : had been relieved of what few valuables I had, as in addition to my watch they had kindly consented to take charge of any stray greenbacks that chanced to be in my pocket-book ; and added to all this was the prospect that instead of reaching home in a few days as I had expected, a dreary and in all probability long confinement was before me. Some of the stories which I had but a short time before read in the papers, of the horrors of life in Andersonville and other southern prisons, came fresh to my mind and were not encouraging ; still, seeing that there was no help for it, I resolved to put as good a face on the matter as possible.

After waiting some two or three hours, and finding that the dismounted men did not arrive, our captors started with us for a point at which it seems they had agreed to meet should they get separated. This was the house of a poor white farmer whom we found, together with his wife and two daughters, at home. They manifested very little concern at receiving such a number of visitors, and the daughters, both of whom were quite pretty, declined to have

any conversation with a "Yank," and little with anyone, for that matter. The house was situated in rear of the new line of our troops, and picket firing along the lines could be distinctly heard during the greater part of the night. From this circumstance I had hopes that some stray party of our forces might discover and recapture us ; but towards morning the firing slacked and this hope left me.

About nine o'clock in the evening quite a stir was made by the arrival of the expected party with several prisoners, mostly sick or stragglers from our forces. One of them, whose presence gave great joy, as much to me, perhaps, just then, as to anyone, was an under-cook of an infantry company with five days' rations of coffee and sugar for his company. This was a god-send indeed to the party,—cold, wet, and hungry as all were. The old farmer and his wife, who probably had not tasted either coffee or sugar since the commencement of the war, suddenly remembered that they had a small piece of bacon and some sweet potatoes, which they would like to exchange. These were soon smoking on the table, and being an officer, after some deliberation I was

invited to take hold and help myself. Feeling by this time quite hungry, I was not slow in availing myself of the privilege. The rest of the prisoners, most of whom had rations in their haversacks, had a cup of coffee given them.

After supper I had some conversation with one of our guards and learned a little something of them. Their regiment was known as Hampton's Legion, (South Carolina), and was attached to Gary's Cavalry Brigade,—on duty in the vicinity of Richmond. As they had scouted in this part of the country during General McClellan's Campaign on the Peninsula, and were familiar with all the roads, they were now occasionally allowed to go on a scout near our lines for the purpose of picking up any information or stragglers, and unfortunately for me, they were out for this purpose on the twenty-seventh of October. The party numbered six, all privates, though one of them was recognized as a sort of leader of the rest, and his orders were generally obeyed without question.

We quartered during the night in the negro shanties of the farmer, two of the party standing guard over

us. Before sunrise we were on the road to Richmond. The weather, though pleasant, for it had cleared during the night, was rather cool at that early hour, which made it very uncomfortable for us, our clothes not having dried much as yet. The course taken I should say was north-westerly, and it was the intention of the leader to pass through White Oak Swamp, supposing that the right of our lines extended to that neighborhood. They all seemed perfectly familiar with every crook and turn of the roads and paths, and from the time we started until we struck the "Nine Mile Road," near Fair Oaks, having travelled certainly fifteen miles, we were not on a main road except to cross it. Crossing the railroad at Savage's station we were halted. It was then noon, and some of the party bargained with the people living there for a peck of sweet potatoes, paying forty dollars for them, of course in Confederate money. These were cooked in the negro quarters, and with a cup of coffee from our cook we made a good dinner. This was my last meal outside of a prison for nearly four months.

After dinner the march was resumed and we passed through the swamp, on emerging from which two scouts were observed, who, after considerable signalling, allowed us to approach them, being rather suspicious of our blue coats. From them was learned the fact, that our forces had retired during the night, and that Gary's Brigade had followed them. This determined the leader to send two of the party with us to Richmond, while he with the remainder rejoined their regiment. I had little to complain of from these men, much less than I expected. With the exception of my watch and money, nothing was taken from me, al though I had a gold pin, which to them must have been quite valuable, and an entire new suit of clothes purchased in Norfolk but a few days before, any article of which would have been a welcome addition to their wardrobe. As we approached Richmond some care was taken by our guards to avoid passing near any prominent works ; still we could see that the lines, although thinly manned with troops, were very formidable. Following the " Nine Mile Road," from the point on which we struck it, until we had passed through the

first line of works, we turned to the left over a corduroy road in rear of this line, down which we went until near Rocket's Landing, a suburb of Richmond, when we passed through the second line and arrived at the camp lately occupied by Gary's Brigade. Here my orderly and myself were compelled to dismount—for we had been allowed to ride the entire day—and after some delay we were all marched to Libby Prison, arriving there about sundown.

Just before reaching Rocket's, my orderly whispered to me that he had sixty dollars which one of the men in camp had placed with him for safe keeping, and asked me to take a part of it. I consented to do so, and he handed it to me without attracting the attention of our guard. I supposed then that the money prisoners had would not be taken from them by the prison authorities, but in this was woefully mistaken.

We were compelled to wait outside of Libby for some time, there being other prisoners ahead of us, but were finally admitted to the office. Here I had to part from my orderly, and it was with many misgivings, for having picked him out from among my

men as too young and light to perform the heavy work required in a battery, I scarcely expected that he would survive the fare and treatment of a rebel prison ; and blaming myself, as I did, for our capture, I felt that if he should die, his death would properly be chargeable to me.

A record of my name, date and place of capture, etc., was entered in a book kept for that purpose, and I was sent into another room to be searched for money and any concealed weapons which might be on my person. The officer having charge of this requested me, if I had any money, to give it up and it would be placed to my credit until I was transferred from there, when it would be returned ; otherwise if on searching any was found, it would be confiscated—for whose benefit he did not say. I handed him the thirty dollars which my orderly had given me, and on assuring him that I had no more, nor any concealed weapons, was removed to the officers' prison in the next story. It might be well to remark that somebody still owes me thirty dollars, unless it is considered as balancing four months' board, although I think that amount, judi-

ciously expended, would have kept me four months longer on the same fare and the balance then be in my favor.

The building known as Libby is a two story and a half brick block, situated in the business part of the city of Richmond, and was built, I believe, for a tobacco warehouse. It is divided into stores connected with each other by double iron doors set in brick partitions. These stores have a row of wooden posts, a foot or more in diameter, braced so as to sustain immense weight, running through the center in each story. The entire block, with the exception of the lower story of the western store, which was used as offices and quarters for the guard, was filled with prisoners. Officers were confined in the other two stories of the west end. Access from the lower to the second story was had by means of wooden steps, which, after being used, were immediately lowered to the floor by a pulley and communication cut off. All glass had been removed from the grated windows, and canvas screens substituted. These being worn and torn, and in some cases absent entirely, formed but poor protection against the

winds, which at this time were quite cool. The interior was bare of furniture, excepting a long pine table to eat from, and two cast-iron wood-stoves; for each of these we were allowed one armful of wood per day, just enough to keep a fire. I don't believe that at any time while I was there it would have been uncomfortable to sit on either stove on account of heat. How much they could impart to a building with open windows, for it was necessary during the day, at least, to have part of the screens down to give us light, can readily be imagined. Most of us had to lie on the bare floor, though a few fortunate individuals had blankets. These were very desirable articles, but the owners soon found that they were not to be the only occupants, having to share them with a little creature, who, although not taking up much room, made it quite uncomfortable for his bed-fellows. Still with this drawback they were eagerly sought for. I managed to get a piece of one, lively too, just before leaving Libby, but was not allowed to carry it away.

Reveill  was sounded about six o'clock in the morning, by a drum band made up from some of our

colored soldiers, who were prisoners, and this was followed in about fifteen minutes by roll-call. For this we fell in, in four ranks, and instead of calling a roll we were counted by the Prison Inspector, "Dick" Turner. After counting, the rooms were carefully searched and then ranks were broken. Any claiming to be sick were examined by the Inspector, and if he thought necessary sent to hospital. Rations were issued shortly after roll-call. They consisted of a piece of corn-bread about three inches long, two wide, and perhaps one inch thick, with a pint of what they called bean soup—black beans boiled in water and seasoned with a little salt, and during the six days that I spent in this prison, I don't believe that one sound bean ever strayed into my ration. The inside of the beans had been eaten by small black bugs, who were still at work when put in the pot. Many could not eat this soup at all, and were forced to subsist on the ration of corn-bread. Being blessed with a good appetite, as well as a pretty strong stomach, I managed to eat my own rations as well as those of some others, who required a gradual breaking in. Nothing more was received

until three or four o'clock in the afternoon, when the breakfast bill of fare was again presented, with sometimes two or three ounces of fresh beef as a substitute for the beans. I need not say that the substitute was a welcome one. Those who had smuggled a little money through were enabled to add some trifles to their bill. Searching my pockets thoroughly a day or two after my entrance I found about a dollar in scrip, which one of the negroes, who helped sweep the room, had the kindness to take out and get changed into Confederate money, receiving therefor five dollars. This I soon invested, buying two onions at a dollar each, some rice which I believe was worth nearly one dollar per pound, a clay pipe and a pound of smoking tobacco — the latter was the only cheap article in the Confederacy, the best costing one dollar per pound at that time.

Our only amusements were walking and smoking; for knowing that our stay in Richmond would be short, and feeling as all new prisoners will, rather blue, we had no ambition to get up any amusements. Those who had been proprietors of blankets a short time had something to keep them busy an hour or

two a day, although it could hardly be classed under the head of amusements.

On the evening of the second of November two days' rations were issued, and we were informed that sometime during the night we would start for a prison depot further South. These rations consisted of three or four ounces of rotten bacon, so rotten that it might have been eaten with a spoon, and the smell of which nothing in the world ever equaled, a small dried haddock, and the usual allowance of corn-bread. I have said that I was blessed with a pretty strong stomach, but this bacon was too heavy for it, and with some difficulty I traded it for more haddock. About two o'clock in the morning we were treated to a serenade by "Turner's Band." They played but one air, the "Long Roll," at which we fell in, were counted, and with the exception of several non-combatants, surgeons and chaplains, who were to be paroled, we were marched through the deserted streets of Richmond, across the bridge to Manchester, where a train of cars awaited us. Here we found a large number of enlisted men also taking passage. All were carefully guarded, so that to

escape was impossible. It was daylight before all were aboard and the train made up. If the members of the "Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals" could have seen that train they would never complain of over crowded cattle cars. These were ordinary box cars, with no windows, only two doors, and but one of these open, which was protected by a grating, and each car was crowded with full sixty human beings. Two guards were stationed inside and six on top of each car. As we had nothing on leaving Richmond in which to carry water, and having eaten quite freely of our dried haddock, our sufferings from thirst soon became intolerable, and had the train not stopped occasionally and the guard allowed one or two to get water from the ditch alongside the track we would soon have been desperate. We arrived at Danville, Virginia, which it seems was our place of destination, during the following night, but were confined in the cars till daylight. How quickly we obeyed the order to turn out, and how good the fresh, cool air felt and tasted to us, after twenty-four hours in hot, crowded and filthy cars, no one can know unless placed in a similar situation.

The prisons were not far from the depot, so that it took but a short time to march to them. On arriving at the door and being admitted it would be difficult to describe our reception. Some three or four hundred men—for few, either from their appearance or dress, could be called officers—met us at the head of the first flight of stairs shouting, “Fresh fish.” “Here they come.” “Don’t hit him.” “Let his hat alone.” “Keep your hands out of his pockets,” and the like. My first impression was that we were in a penitentiary and that most of the prisoners were rebel convicts, with a small scattering of Union officers, but finding that, notwithstanding the noise, nothing happened to us, I began to look about and soon discovered several friends; to one of them, an officer of my own regiment, I attached myself, he kindly volunteering to show me the ropes.

The officers’ prison was called number three, and like Libby, had evidently been built for a tobacco warehouse. The interior was also similar, except, that standing alone, it admitted light from all sides. The rooms in which prisoners were confined, (the

second and third stories), had windows containing glass, but the lower story, where two or three sentinels were stationed, and where we were allowed to walk during daylight for exercise, had windows without glass, and, although boarded up half way, they afforded ample play for the cold winds, which made it very uncomfortable lying without blankets on a single board floor, with cracks almost wide enough to let us through. Our room was heated by two of the oldest fashioned cylinder stoves that I ever saw, and for fuel we had a poor bituminous coal, brought to Danville by canal from the interior of the State. When our stock of this was exhausted, four of us were allowed to go to the pile for more, a distance of nearly a quarter of a mile, under charge of two sentinels. It required an hour or two of hard work in the frozen dust and slate to fill our box, which we carried stretcher fashion. These stoves heated the room very imperfectly, owing to the poor quality of the coal, the thickness of the stoves, the cracks in the floor, and the circle that usually congregated around them, sometimes four or five deep. This circle was generally quite good natured,

and hailed the arrival of anyone to its inner rank, whether by strategy or otherwise, with the shout, "Another man made happy." A large number seldom visited the inner circle, but managed to keep warm, when it was very cold, by moving at a double quick around the room, one after another. This was good exercise, and when warm we remained so for some time, while those who hugged the stove most, were the coldest when away from it.

A great variety of uniforms were observable, few having an officer's dress entire. Nearly all had some article of grey, and some had full suits; others had little enough of any kind. There being a ready market in our guard for anything we had to sell, in the shape of boots, clothes, watches, buttons, jewelry, etc., everything of that kind that could be dispensed with, and some that could not well be, had been disposed of. I had several merchantable articles, and my friend volunteering to exchange them at current rates, I placed them at his disposal. A pair of boots brought one hundred and twenty dollars; a necktie ten dollars; and a pair of black kid

gloves twenty dollars. (My pants were traded for a pair of second-hand shoes and another pair of pants—grey.) With the money thus obtained we bought from the guard, who smuggled them in at night, and probably made a handsome profit themselves, a peck of beans at forty dollars; a peck of Irish potatoes, about the size of walnuts, at forty dollars; two or three pounds of salt, which at that time cost us but fifty cents a pound, though it afterwards touched a dollar; several pounds of flour, for thickening our bean soup, at eighty cents per pound; this also rose nearly out of sight, costing as high as two dollars and a half per pound; and six little red peppers, for five dollars, to season with. Having nothing to cook in, we bought three shares in a mess-pan, at two dollars per share. There were twenty shares in the pan, owned by different individuals. Those of whom we purchased had run out of extra provisions, and hence had no need of cooking utensils. Our buying three shares gave us a larger control of the pan and enabled us to crush out smaller competitors.

While these lasted we lived in clover, but "when

we died we died all over." They gave out at last, and we were forced to sell our shares in the pan to more fortunate individuals, and fall back on our regulars.

In cooking beans, they were in the first place hung in a tin cup against the stove until boiled sufficiently, then taken down into the yard, more water and the potatoes added, and with a few chips picked up while out for water, boiled until cooked. Chips were rather scarce and it cost considerable labor to keep a supply. I have seen an officer, who at home had probably never split a piece of wood in his life, beg a log which the guard had rejected as too tough and knotty for their axes, and with nothing but about six inches of a broken scythe and a stone, work all day splitting off enough to cook a cup of coffee made from a crust of burnt bread. The rations here, as at Libby, were principally corn-bread. Bean soup was not so plentiful, nor was fresh beef. The day's ration of corn bread was always issued in the morning, and soup or beef, when we had any, in the afternoon.

Previous to their arrival at Danville, the officers

had been confined at Salisbury, North Carolina, where they were quartered in small houses or barracks. These houses each appointed commissaries to draw and issue rations to the messes, of which there were several in each house. For convenience this organization was still preserved. Rations for all were issued under supervision of the commissary of the entire building.

The cook-house for the prisoners was nearly opposite, and could readily be seen from our windows and many longing eyes were cast on it. An officer looking out one day, when we knew we were to have bean soup, suddenly exclaimed, "Don't you see those fat hogs scratching themselves against the cook-house fence?" pointing to two or three sickle-backs, of which it is said it takes two to make a shadow, who were engaged in the occupation peculiar to their race, scratching, an operation which most of us indulged in freely. Bean soup was the basis of many good jokes; it was hardly solid enough to be the basis of anything else.

Considerable excitement was raised by the rebel commissary sergeant informing us one morning that

we were to have pork and beans issued to us in the afternoon. Visions of the old-fashioned New England Sunday breakfast rose rapidly before us, especially those who had had experience with them at home, only to be widely dispelled by the reality. At the usual hour "Buckets for soup" was called. They were sent out. Their return was anxiously awaited by a large number congregated in the lower story to get the first sight. Bucket after bucket came in, presenting the ordinary appearance, until nearly twenty—our usual allowance—were before us, when it was discovered that what had been taken for scum in one of the pails was really a piece of pork. It was fished out with a stick, and a dozen or so, after weighing it carefully in their hands, and looking at it fondly with their eyes, placed its weight at inside of a pound and a half. What a rich treat for four hundred hungry men. However, it was divided into six pieces, one to each house. In our house the messes drew lots for it, and the end was, one man ate the ration of pork for sixty, and lived; at least that didn't kill him.

We were allowed plenty of drinking water, which

we brought ourselves, in the same buckets that were used for soup, from a spring some two or three hundred yards from the prison, and about the same distance from the river Dan, from which the town takes its name. Any one wishing to go for water would procure one or two empty pails, and cry out, "Buckets for water," which usually brought a dozen or more, when the sergeant of the guard being informed through a sentinel, would send two of his guard with the party, after counting them.

We were early risers from necessity, the cold forcing us up long before nature had satisfied her demand for sleep. When the sun had risen and in a measure warmed the building, and rations had been issued and eaten, the real business of the day was commenced. This was a searching examination of every particular seam and thread in our clothes, from head to foot, for vermin, which was plentiful, and from the visitation of which none were exempt. It would have been a comical sight to an outsider to have looked in upon us any pleasant morning, about nine o'clock—the floor literally packed with men, squatted tailor fashion, studying some article of their

clothing as intently as ever school-boy studied his book.

For amusements we had chess and checker playing—the men made of wood; card playing, with one or two packs of dirty and hardly legible cards; smoking, walking, laughing, singing and talking. The latter, better known among us as “chin,” was certainly the most prolific source of amusement. Any report from the guard, or or that some one had seen in a rebel paper an article on exchange of prisoners, especially if the paper was produced, was sufficient to cause the wildest excitement, and a buzzing probably as great as that at the building of the Tower of Babel. An item of two or three lines often formed the basis for a week’s “chin.” Numbers whiled the time away by manufacturing bone-work, of which I saw some very beautiful specimens, in the shape of rings, napkin-rings, breastpins, etc., rivalling any made by those having all the necessary tools. I tried my hand at making a ring from a piece of bone found in my ration of meat, but after rubbing it all one day on a brick, to reduce it to the proper thickness, with

little visible effect, gave up in disgust. Of course in such a large body of men, there were some fine singers, who favored us, when in the mood, with some excellent singing. That which suited me best, was, when some one, after we had lain down and were waiting for sleep to come, started "Rally Round the Flag," "John Brown," or some other song with a good chorus. This would be taken up by the whole of us, up stairs and down, and sounded grand, even to our rebel guard, who appreciated the music if not the words.

There were but few escapes from this prison, and for pretty good reasons. We were securely guarded by a chain of sentinels, who, during the night, were obliged half-hourly to call the number of their post, and "All's well." Our distance from the Union lines, the nearest point of which it was feasible to attempt reaching being Plymouth, North Carolina, and the distance by the roads we should have been obliged to take, nearly two hundred miles, and the almost total want of boots or shoes, many having nothing but the tops of their boots tied on for soles, deterred the few who had the opportunity to try. Still four

or five made the attempt, and, I believe, with success. The road for escape was discovered by accident. A number were out for water, and on returning, while stopping to rest, one of the party stepped into a wood shed, in front of which they had halted, to pick up some chips. The guard, not noticing his absence, ordered the party to move on, which they did, some one picking up his pail. After dark he probably started for our lines. The discovery of this road led to the finding of another, somewhat similar. In going for water, as I have before said, a dozen or so, with one or two pails, as they pleased, were allowed to go, under two sentinels. Between the prison and spring, there was a very steep decline of perhaps twenty feet, at the foot of which was quite a large oven for baking the moulds used in a foundry alongside for casting shot and shell, and a few feet in front of this foundry ran a canal, spanned by a very rickety foot bridge, that required all our eyes in crossing. A prisoner having determined to make the trial, would ascertain the condition of the oven, and if it had not been used, towards night get a party to go for water, having arranged beforehand

with them how to manage. On passing out some one would attract the attention of the Sergeant, to prevent counting, if possible, and having fairly started, another would engage the guard in rear in conversation, causing him to move slow and scattering the party pretty well. The foremost guard on arriving at the bridge had all he could attend to while on it, and this gave the opportunity to the individual proposing to leave, who, handing his pail to a friend, would quietly step into the oven before the rear guard arrived at the edge of the hill. This mode of escape was not always available, as we sometimes had a cross-grained Sergeant of the guard who persisted in doing his duty and counting us. Of course if there was any suspicion among us that we had been counted, it was risking the exposure of our plan to attempt it.

Just after dark on the evening of February sixteenth, the Commanding Sergeant came into our rooms, struck a light, and read to us a dispatch from Richmond, to the Commander of prisoners at Danville, directing him to forward next day, one-half his prisoners for exchange, and the balance the day

after. Most of us had lain down, but in an instant everyone was on his feet shouting, cheering, laughing, talking, and maybe some crying for joy. There was little sleep the remainder of that night—once in a while a lull, generally followed by a storm. The order read one-half the prisoners, and applied to officers as well as enlisted men. It was not given out until next day how this selection was to be made, and each hoped to find himself among the fortunates. In the morning, the prison Adjutant came in and notified us that all those whose names were included between the letters A and M would go. This put a damper on some of us, and made me wish I had been born an Angell, or even a Bird; but we consoled ourselves with the reflection that we would be but a day behind. About one o'clock roll was called, and on answering to their names, the fortunates started for the depot, bearing our good wishes. Those of us who were left set to work cleaning up a little, and had nearly finished, when we were amazed by seeing the entire party return. Nothing was known as to the cause, and many surmises were made, the most discouraging of

course. Late in the evening an order came for all to hold themselves in readiness, followed by the order to march to the depot, and on arriving there, we found half a dozen trains waiting. The delay had been caused by some accident above Danville, and led to the accumulation of empty cars enough to accomodate all. Few guards were sent with the train, and they paid us little attention, allowing us to get on or off as we pleased, and to ride on top. The cars, although nearly as crowded as when we went down, were thus rendered quite comfortable.

We arrived at Manchester about noon the next day, and after a delay of several hours, the train crossed the bridge and entered the city. Here occurred a comical scene. The cars no sooner stopped, than all of us, paying no attention whatever to the guard, jumped off and started for Libby, each anxious to get there first and secure a good place. None had any thought to escape, yet it was after dark before the entire party were inside the walls. A number finding that they were too late to secure good positions, spent the time in wandering around the city, until warned by darkness and the

provost guard that it was time to make arrangements for sleeping.

Next morning, boxes sent by our friends in the North, and which had accumulated to the number of nearly a hundred, were distributed after an inspection, and Libby was at once transformed into a vast cook-house. A couple of bricks taken from the walls and placed anywhere on the floor—there were no chimneys—with a few chips split off the boxes, gave us the opportunity to cook and eat our first square meal in nearly four months. These boxes contained a little of everything, and evidently reflected the taste of their owners. An old officer near me had ten or twelve pounds of lard—nothing else; another had all flour, others a variety of everything from a ham to a bottle of medicine. Knowing that we should remain but a day or two, and determined not to leave anything for the Johnnies, quite a general distribution took place, those having boxes sharing with their less fortunate friends. By eating too much, and from the dense smoke of so many fires, numbers were made sick, causing quite a run on medicines. Boxes of Spencer's pills, (genuine too,

sent by Mr. Spencer to his son, who was one of us), castor oil, and other searchers, disappeared rapidly and to good purpose.

On the twentieth we signed our paroles, and on the morning of the twenty-second, (Washington's birthday), we started for Rocket's Landing to take the flag of truce boat, first destroying everything belonging to us that was destructible and which might prove of any value to the rebels. Arriving at Rocket's, a boat was found awaiting us, and there was little delay in getting aboard, each one seemingly afraid that he might get left. The day was delightful, and moving rather slowly, we had a fine opportunity to view the rebel's works along the shore of the James, and the several iron-clads at anchor in it. The distance from Richmond to Bulwer's Landing, our destination, was but about seven miles, though it took an hour to steam there. Here was found Colonel Mulford, having charge of exchange on the Union side, who held a short conversation with Colonel Ould, acting in the same capacity for the rebels, after which we were allowed to disembark, a privilege of which we were not long in

availing ourselves. No time was lost in making for our picket lines, which could be seen a short distance up the hill. All cheering was done on the run. I felt like hugging our colored soldiers, who composed the picket, and might have done so but for the desire to put as great a distance between myself and Richmond in as short time as possible. From Bulwer's to Aiken's Landing is full two miles, and long ones they were to us who were so unused to walking. At Aikens we found our flag of truce boat waiting for us. Several hours were consumed in bringing over the sick and the weak in ambulances, during which time we received a serenade from the band of a cavalry regiment. I also heard from my battery, which was stationed a short distance from the landing, but was unable to visit it.

Late in the afternoon, Colonel Mulford arriving with the last of our men, lines were cast off, and the boat steamed down the James, bound for Annapolis, where was located a large parole camp. Here we were detained several days waiting for our "leaves of absence," which at last arrived and we started for home. While walking through the streets of Annap-

olis one morning, I was very agreeably surprised at meeting my orderly, (carpet-bag in hand and bound North), from whom I had heard nothing since parting from him in Libby. He looked quite well, and told me that although once detailed with a party to go South, he had never left Richmond until paroled.

This ends the sketch of my four months' experience, and I have endeavored to present it without exaggeration. That it was short, comparatively, and not very severe, you can readily see, and yet it was long and severe enough to enable me to form some idea of the suffering of our poor fellows at Andersonville and elsewhere. I have not mentioned, nor can anyone who has not himself been through some such experience imagine, our sufferings from hunger. Although the rations were sufficient to keep soul and body together, yet they never fully satisfied the craving for food. This craving showed itself in all our conversation and affected all our dreams.

